

# Contents

Series Editor’s Preface ..... v

Introduction..... ix

**1** The Individual as a Context ..... 1

**2** English Language Teaching and Learning  
at the National Level in Colombia ..... 5

**3** English Language Teaching and Learning in Barranquilla..... 15

**4** Our LTO ..... 23

**5** A Day in the Life of a Teacher in Our LTO ..... 33

**6** A Day in the Life of a Learner in Our LTO..... 37

**7** The Big Picture ..... 41

**8** Reflections..... 49

References ..... 53

# Introduction

In 1964, Richard D. Abraham, then at Rockford College in Illinois, in the United States, published an article in *The Modern Language Journal* titled “Linguistics and Modern Language Teaching in Colombia.” The article contains some fascinating insights into the thinking at that time. Abraham presented examples from an English language textbook then being used in Colombian secondary schools, including the following sentence, in English, to be translated into Spanish: “The parrot of my house is very fat and speaks in the tree of the fence of the house of my sister” (p. 219).

Abraham (1964) concludes with another statement that shows how far we have come since the 1960s (which for many of us is a significant part of our lifetime):

We do not say that Colombian classes in science or mathematics or Spanish should be conducted as they are in the United States. . . . But we do believe that the English classes should, for instance, begin on time, not because it’s right, but because that’s the American custom. (pp. 221–222)

Unfortunately, Professor Abraham appears to have passed away some years ago. Otherwise, it would have been illuminating to hear what he would have to say about English language teaching and learning in Colombia today, which is the focus of this book.

In 2014, 40 years after Abraham’s paper was published, Álvarez Valencia published an article on the intercultural perspectives in foreign language teaching in Colombia, based on a review of six of the top Colombian academic journals that focus on culture and foreign language teaching in the country. In stark contrast to his academic predecessor, Álvarez Valencia concludes that

the palette of language and culture-related issues becomes every time more complex and hybrid in countries such as Colombia where the mercurial rise of the digital, the advent of computer-mediated intercultural

communication, and the possibilities of travel abroad are constantly shaping the communication landscape and the sociocultural configuration of the country. (p. 239)

Clearly, in terms of English language teaching (ELT) in Colombia, a great deal has changed in the four decades between Abraham's and Álvarez Valencia's publications, which puts this book, in many ways, at the intersection of where ELT in Colombia was, where it is now, and where it could be headed in the immediate future. In the opening chapters, the three authors, Kathleen Corrales, Erica Ferrer Ariza, and Lourdes Rey Paba—two from Colombia and one originally from the United States—explain that their particular language teaching and learning organization (LTO) is not in the capital, Bogotá, but in Barranquilla, which is situated on the Caribbean coast, far from the capital. That creates its own set of educational challenges. It is also worth noting that the authors represent a wealth of experience of English language teaching and learning in Colombia and that they have been working together at this particular LTO for the past 5 years as part of the leadership team.

The authors highlight some of the current educational challenges facing Colombia, for example, the fact that the 2013 report of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that Colombia placed 62 out of the 65 countries in which students took the PISA tests (see Chapter 2). In Chapter 4, the authors explain that the university within which their LTO operates is “a private, non profit institution that receives no governmental funding. Its resources derive from student tuition, research, and consulting projects, and all of its profits are reinvested into the infrastructure of the university and scholarships for students” (p. 24). This is an important point, as one of the goals of this ELT In Context series is to showcase some LTOs that are nonprofit and that do not have the geographic, economic, and political advantages of being in the capital of the country. Although the authors' LTO is not in the capital, they have set high standards and have accomplished them.

To help readers get as deep an understanding of the local language teaching and learning context as possible, each book in the series has a short chapter on A Day in the Life of a Teacher and one on A Day in the Life of a Learner in the authors' LTO (Chapters 5 and 6), based on composite characterizations. In this book, Chapter 5 describes the daily lives of full-time and part-time teachers as well as program coordinators, while Chapter 6 gives insights into the day-to-day lives of full-time undergraduate students and adult professionals who are working while studying.

In Chapter 7, on the Big Picture, the authors present a series of lessons learned from researching and writing this book. And in the eighth and final chapter, they conclude that “this book, which required us to analyze our whole context through the lens of its various layers (national, local, university, and LTO), has sharpened our awareness of the place the LTO occupies locally and

nationally" (p. 50). Such conclusions illustrate another feature of this ELT In Context series, in which the authors understand their own English language teaching and learning contexts better as a result of presenting them to others.

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